

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gatherings and Community Spread in Southwest Nebraska

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) had 192 new cases of COVID-19 reported from October 27th to November 2nd. A breakout by county includes: Chase – 20; Dundy – 12; Frontier – 8; Furnas – 22; Hayes – 3; Hitchcock – 15; Keith – 25; Perkins – 13; Red Willow – 77. This brings the totals for the health district to 947 cases with 551 cases recovered. One additional death due to COVID-19 was reported as well.

Case investigations have revealed that most of the current spread of COVID-19 in southwest Nebraska is occurring at small gatherings and workplaces, along with community spread. SWNPHD recommends that everyone take precautions to protect their friends, neighbors, and coworkers by avoiding the 3 C's, even in small groups, which are 1) crowded places, 2) close contact, and 3) confined spaces.

Event safety plans are still required by the Directed Health Measures for venues with a total capacity of 500 people or more, and must be approved by SWNPHD. Plans for venues that hold less than 500 people should be sent to city or village officials for approval. Currently no indoor event plans will be approved unless all participants are required to wear masks for the entire indoor portion of the event, until the community risk dial is no longer at orange. Anyone organizing a gathering should separate participants into groups of 8 or less and limit contact between groups, to reduce the number of potential exposures.

To this point there has been very little spread related to school attendance. The school systems and public health are working diligently to quickly identify and isolate positive staff or students and quarantine their close contacts. Many schools are requiring masks while the risk dial is in orange, which has greatly reduced the number of students or staff that need to quarantine by preventing exposures in classrooms. These methods have proven effective enough that in the event the community risk dial moves to red, most schools will be able to continue with in-person learning.

The COVID-19 Community Risk Dial for the week of November 2nd remains at orange, meaning residents of southwest Nebraska have a high risk of contracting COVID-19. Testing is available but may require travel. Healthcare systems in the health district and across the state are burdened by the number of people hospitalized for COVID-19. Orange level recommendations include wearing a mask in public, washing hands and surfaces often, limiting travel, and working from home when

possible. High-risk and vulnerable individuals should avoid public places.

COVID-19 information is available at dhhs.ne.gov and swhealth.ne.gov. You can also follow SWNPHD on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. SWNPHD serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. SWNPHD is located at 404 West 10th St (1 block north of Arby's) in McCook.

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